

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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SUBJ: THE MALTESE ELECTION: HEADIN' FOR THE LAST ROUNDUP

REF: VALLETTA 1035

1. THE LAST WEEKEND OF THE MALTESE ELECTION CAMPAIGN PASSED NOISILY, BUT ORDERLY, AS THE LABOR AND NATIONALIST PARTIES HLD RIVAL MASS MEETINGS AND NUMEROUS SMALLER PUBLIC RALLIES IN LAST MINUTE EFFORTS TO ATTRACT VOTES. THE DECIBEL LEVEL OF THEIR ACTIVITIES WAS IMPRESSIVE, THE CONTENT LESS SO. THERE WERE SOME INCIDENTS OF STREET VIOLENCE BETWEEN THE FACTIONS, BUT NO MAJOR FLARE-UPS.

2. BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES CONTINUE TO DRAW GOOD CROWDS AT THEIR MEETINGS, WHICH IS INDICATIVE OF THE HIGHT

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INTEREST IN THE OUTCOME OF THE BITTER STRUGGLE WHICH THEY

HAVE WAGED FOR SO LONG. IN THE LAST ELECTION IN 1971, ALMOST NINETY-THREE PERCENT OF THE ELIGIBLE VOTERS CAST THEIR BALLOTS. ANOTHER LARGE TURNOUT THIS WEEK COULD BE HELPFUL TO THE NATIONALISTS IN THEIR STRONG EFFORT TO NIP MINTOFF AND THE LABORITES AT THE WIRE.

3. PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF, THE STUMP-SPEAKER PAR EXCELLENCE, HAS BEEN HOLDING FORTH TWO OR THREE TIMES A WEEK, WITH HIS SEEMINGLY NON-STOP PUBLIC MONOLOGUES. HE DRAWS THE CROWDS, AND HE WORKS THEM SKILLFULLY. THE ONLY REAL QUESTION IS HOW MANY OF THE UNCOMMITTED "FLOATING" VOTERS HE IS ADDING TO HIS FERVENT, HARD-CORE LABORITES. THE NATIONALIST LEADER, GIORGIO BORG OLIVIER, CERTAINLY IS NO MATCH FOR MINTOFF AS FAR AS CROWD APPEAL IS CONCERNED, BUT EVEN HE HAS BEGUN TO DEMONSTRATE MORE "GET-UP-AND-GO" AS THE CAMPAIGN NEARS ITS END.

4. AT A PUBLIC MEETING ON SEPTEMBER 12, MINTOFF GRANDLY "REVEALED" THE NAMES OF THE OTHER TWO COUNTRIES (IN ADDITION TO ALGERIA AND LIBYA) WHICH HE SAYS HAVE "GUARANTEED" MALTA'S FUTURE AFTER 1979. MINTOFF SAID HIS NEW PARTNERS IN MALTESE-STYLE MEDITERRANEAN NEUTRALITY WILL BE FRANCE AND ITALY. HE ADMITTED THAT ITALIAN SUPPORT IS A LITTLE LESS THAN ABSOLUTE, SINCE HE SAID ROME'S AGREEMENT MUST BE APPROVED BY THE ITALIAN PARLIAMENT AND CHECKED OUT WITH ITALY'S FELLOW EEC MEMBERS. ON THE OTHER HAND, MINTOFF CLAIMED THAT FRANCE ("A FORMER MEMBER OF NATO"), HAD GIVEN MALTA'S LABOR GOVERNMENT A "WRITTEN GUARANTEE" TO SAFEGUARD MALTESE SOVEREIGNTY AFTER 1979. (COMMENT: THE FRENCH EMBASSY HERE IS RATHER DISTURBED AT MINTOFF'S FREE AND EASY USE OF THE FACTS, AND HAS CABLED PARIS FOR INSTRUCTIONS IN RESPONSE TO HIS REMARKS. APPARENTLY, ALL THE FRENCH HAVE GIVEN THE MALTESE IS AN AIDE MEMOIRE ACKNOWLEDGING RECEIPT OF MINTOFF'S DRAFT "TREATY" ON THE POST-1979 ERA DURING THE RECENT VISIT TO MALTA OF SECRETARY OF STATE DESTREMAU. WHILE INDICATING THAT THE FUTURE NEUTRALITY OF MALTA MIGHT BE ACCEPTABLE TO THE FRENCH, THE AIDE MEMOIRE IS A LONG WAY FROM THE KIND OF WRITTEN GUARANTEE MINTOFF CLAIMS TO HAVE FROM THE GOF. END COMMENT).

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5. IN THE SAME SPEECH, MINTOFF RAN THROUGH A LONG LIST OF COUNTRIES WHICH HE SAID HAVE BEEN OF ASSISTANCE TO HIS LABOR GOVERNMENT OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS. HE PHUTHIS TO "PROVE" HOW SUCCESSFUL HIS IDEAS ON FOREIGN POLICY HAVE BEEN, COMPARED WITH THE "RIDICULOUS" PROPOSALS OF THE NATIONALISTS. AMONG THE COUNTRIES FIGURING PROMINENTLY IN MINTOFF'S LIST OF AID PROVIDERS WAS THE US, LAST WEEK'S

VILLAIN OF THE HOUR (REFTEL).

6. WITHOUT A BLUSH, THE AMERICANS (PREVIOUSLY DESCRIBED BY MINTOFF AS HAVING GIVEN MALTA ONLY VENEREAL DISEASE) WERE TROTTED OUT AS BIG SPENDERS TO IMPRESS A NEW MINTOFF AUDIENCE. SPEAKING PROUDLY OF THE 14 MILLION POUNDS ANNUAL RENT HE HAD EXTRACTED FROM THE NATO POWERS, MINTOFF SAID THAT THE AMERICANS WERE "FORKING OUT MORE THAN 5 MILLION POUNDS A YEAR" OF THE TOTAL WITHOUT EVEN HAVING PERMISSION FOR THE SIXTH FLEET TO ENTER MALTESE PORTS. MINTOFF ADDED THAT THE AMERICANS ALSO HAD GIVEN "MILLIONS OF POUNDS" WORTH OF EQUIPMENT, AS WELL AS MADE "VARIOUS SOFT LOANS" TO HIS GOVERNMENT.

7. "DO YOU KNOW WHY THE AMERICANS ARE HELPING US", MINTOFF ASKED? "BECAUSE WE ARE KEEPING THE RUSSIANS AWAY". HE ADDED THAT THE RUSSIANS ALSO WOULD HELP MALTA IN THE FUTURE, BECAUSE HIS GOVERNMENT "WAS KEEPING THE AMERICANS AWAY". FINALLY, MINTOFF LAUGHINGLY SAID THAT THE CHINESE WERE HELPING MALTA TOO, BECAUSE HE HAD SUCCEEDED IN KEEPING THE NAVIES OF BOTH OF THE "SUPER POWERS" AWAY FROM MALTA'S SHORES. MINTOFF LEFT HIS AUDIENCE WITH THE CLEAR IMPRESSION THAT IF HE IS RE-ELECTED, THEN HE WILL CONTINUE TO WORK THE SAME SHELL GAME ON THE THREE BIG POWERS AFTER 1979.

8. COMMENT: AND SO IT GOES AS THE CAMPAIGN DRAWS TO AN END. AT THIS STAGE, THE LABORITES APPEAR NERVOUS ABOUT HOW MUCH OF THE GAP THE NATIONALISTS HAVE CLOSED, WHILE THE NATIONALISTS ARE LOOKING AND ACTING MORE CONFIDENT AS THE SEPTEMBER 17-18 POLLING DAYS APPROACH. IT LOOKS TO BE A CLOSE ONE. END COMMENT. SMITH

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